

Escape the Scam Trap



Each year people are victimized by extremely persuasive and friendly swindlers. Today, consumers not only have to deal with door-to-door con artists, but hundreds of mail and e-mail scams.

International Lottery Scams

Scam operators, often based in Canada, use the telephone and direct mail to encourage consumers to buy chances in high-stakes foreign lotteries. Lured by the prospects of instant wealth, U.S. consumers are losing millions on these scams.

Before responding to foreign lotteries consider:

- If you play a foreign lottery, either over the phone or via mail, you're violating federal law.
- Most foreign lotteries are phony.
- If you purchase one foreign lottery ticket, expect more bogus lottery or investment sales pitches. Your name will be placed on a "sucker list" that con artists buy and sell.
- Keep your credit card and bank account numbers to yourself. Do not give these numbers out.
- If you are asked to pay taxes or fees to get your winnings, don't mail a check. It's a scam.

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Check Overpayment Scams

Someone answers your classified ad and offers to pay with a cashier's or personal check. At the last minute, the so-called buyer, comes up with a reason for writing the check for more than the purchase price and asks you to wire back the difference. Later the check bounces.

Here's how to avoid a check overpayment scam:

- Know who you're dealing with and confirm the buyer's name, address and phone number.
- Don't accept a check for more than your selling price, no matter how tempting.
- If you accept payment by check, ask for a check drawn on a local bank so you can make sure the check is valid at that bank.
- Resist any pressure to act now.

Phishing Scams

Phishing is a new twist on an old telemarketing scam; however, instead of using the phone, scam artists use the computer e-mail system. Here are some tips so you don't become a victim:

Consumer Tips:

- Never give out your personal financial information over the phone or the computer, unless you were the one to make the first contact. Banks will **never** e-mail and ask you to "verify" your financial information or click on a special site link.
- Do not respond to an e-mail that may warn of dire consequences.
- Check your credit card and bank account statements regularly and look for unauthorized charges, even small ones. Report these discrepancies immediately.
- If you do respond to a fraudulent e-mail, contact your bank immediately so they can help protect your account and identity.